

## Sports Physical Therapy for the Child or Adolescent Athlete

For a youngster with a sports related injury, physical therapy treatment can offer an opportunity to minimize lost playing time and maximize performance upon return. Children can be particularly susceptible to sports injuries for a variety of reasons. Children younger than eight years old have slower reaction times and are less coordinated because they are still growing and developing. Also there is a large discrepancy between the height and weight of children of the same age causing an increased risk of injury. Children may unknowingly take greater risks than adults during athletics because they may not assess the danger of the situation like an adult.

In addition, because young athletes are increasingly exposed to overtraining and excessive levels of physical activity, overuse injuries are becoming more prevalent. Children are often playing the same sport year round or multiple sports during the season causing overtraining. Overuse injuries occur from the repetitive actions that place too much stress on the bones and muscles. If not managed properly and efficiently overuse injuries can affect normal physical growth and maturation. Prevention is the key; gradual rather than rapid increases in duration and intensity of training can usually thwart physical breakdown.

Certain intrinsic factors can predispose a young athlete to overuse injuries. Poor alignment and posture can lead to abnormal stresses on the immature skeleton. Muscular imbalances can result in muscular strain and overuse. Children who have a rapid growth spurt may demonstrate decreased flexibility of the musculotendinous unit leading to injury. If identified early, the progressive inflexibility associated with rapid growth can be prevented with a stretching program that can reduce the risk of injury.

Some of the most common types of sports related overuse injuries in the young athlete are of the following:

- **Anterior knee pain** is pain in front of the knee or under the knee cap. The knee is usually sore or swollen. The cause is usually due to muscular imbalance caused by weakness and poor flexibility.
- **Little League Elbow** is caused by repetitive throwing that can result in pain and tenderness of the elbow. The pain typically occurs after the follow through of the throw. Pitchers sometimes complain of loss of velocity or decreased endurance.
- **Swimmers shoulder** is an inflammation of the shoulder caused by the repeated overhead movements associated with swimming or throwing a ball.
- **Shin splints** are characterized by pain in the front of the lower part of the legs. They are often caused by repeated running on a hard surface or overtraining at the beginning of a season.

Children and adolescents are not little adults and careful attention must be paid to the child's musculoskeletal development in order to provide the most safe and effective treatment.

Kids' Therapy Center focuses on helping young athletes regain mobility and muscle strength through a multi-pronged approach:

- Each athlete is evaluated to determine their needs. Therapists evaluate muscular strength, joint range of motion, posture and gait.
- Customized treatment assists each child in maximizing their potential.
- Sports injury prevention and follow up help the athlete minimize reinjury.
- Therapeutic exercise, mobility training to improve endurance, muscle strength and postural reeducation help each child reach their potential.
- Ongoing consultation with doctors and other specialists to optimize a child's participation in sports and other activities.